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A CANADIAN WOMAN'S GUIDE TO
INITIATING POLITICAL ACTION

PENNEY KOME

MARCH 1983

THE CANADIAN ADVISORY COUNCIL
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

PLAY FROM STRENGTH

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K1P 5R5

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PLAY FROM STRENGTH

A CANADIAN WOMAN'S GUIDE TO INITIATING POLITICAL ACTION

The country is yours, ladies. Politics is simply a public affair: yours and mine and everyone's. . ."

Nellie McClung, 1917

In 1981, Canadian women demanded and got a paramount equal rights clause in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of the new Constitution. This victory opens the way for further advancement. It also shows how women have won all their rights in modern times: by demanding them.

Anyone who has ever organized a committee meeting probably has the basic know-how to initiate political action around a hot community issue. Look in the papers — women are doing it all the time. They're organizing around school closings, unsafe tap water, neighbourhood redevelopment, and any other issue that affects their families and communities. Women seem to have organizing in their blood. And, as many of our grandmothers were drawn into the suffragist movement through their involvement in social work, temperance, abolition or unionization, so many modern women find that feminism can lend insights into every campaign to regain community control.

But there's no reason that every group should have to learn all the basic lessons the hard way. Often, issues arise so fast that organizers are forced to work by 'ad hoc-ery' — that is, improvisation. The method can be effective (e.g., the constitutional lobby), but there's a lot of wasted effort too. This booklet will be a Canadian woman's guide to making every bit of that effort count. It will help you define your issue and your goals, organize a working group, enlist public support, analyze and work with the media, take your message to the appropriate authority, and help you bring about change.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW TO CHOOSE AN ISSUE, OR WHAT TO DO WHEN AN ISSUE CHOOSES YOU

Most women have so many responsibilities in their daily lives that they do not go out looking for ways to become involved in the political process. Mostly, women hope and expect that their elected representatives will do a reasonably good job of governing. Women are usually shocked to discover that the suffragists were right: the political process *needs* women's participation in order to maintain a realistic perspective. Once drawn into a campaign, women often go on to work in party politics or to run for office. But that first campaign can be rough.

A recent example of a most important and successful lobby was the one which women staged to entrench their rights in the Constitution.

Women's organizations started out by asking politely that the proposed Charter of Rights be worded carefully so that women had an unequivocal guarantee of equality with men. More than twenty women's groups including the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) made presentations to the Special Committee on the Constitution. Changes to the Charter announced in November 1980 met some of women's concerns, but not all of them.

On February 14, 1981, several hundred women attended a Women and the Constitution conference, held in the West Block of the House of Commons. The conference was originally planned by the CACSW. When it was postponed, a number of women's voluntary groups formed an ad hoc coalition and proceeded to hold the conference. The CACSW provided copies of its research papers for the conference participants.

HOW TO CHOOSE AN ISSUE

After the event, the conference organizers took the conference resolution to Parliament and told the government again (less politely this time) that the Charter must be amended to assert that equality between women and men is a primary value in this nation. In support of the lobby group, thousands of other women visited, telephoned, telegrammed or wrote letters to their Members of Parliament. Two months of hard lobbying won women a new Section 28 in the Charter, guaranteeing all rights and freedoms equally to male and female persons. This new section met with unanimous approval in the House in April 1981. Women thought that the direction to the courts contained in Section 28 was the best protection of equality that had yet been attained.

However, at the November meeting between the Prime Minister and the provincial Premiers, three days of negotiations led to a compromise agreement that would allow the federal or provincial governments to "override" some of the Charter's promised rights and freedoms. That is, either level of government could pass a new law that was contrary to the Charter (though it would have to expire in five years), simply by prefacing the new law with a phrase like, "Notwithstanding Section 15 of the Charter of Rights." As announced, the Accord and its override covered fundamental freedoms, legal rights and equality rights—Section 2, and Sections 7 through 15. Women's groups asked whether Section 28 was covered under the override. After some delay, the Prime Minister announced that it was.

Women started lobbying again. This time their visits, phone calls, telegrams and letters were directed at the provincial and territorial governments as well as the federal. Within three weeks, the furious lobbying all across the country led to statements from all the Premiers that Section 28 should remain paramount and unaffected by the override. Women had won again; but they were angry that they should have had to fight at all, much less twice.

"I was enraged to think we still have to *fight* for women's rights", a Toronto woman wrote to the Ad Hoc Committee that was a major

organizer of the constitutional lobby. "I was coasting along thinking we already were considered equal to men. How foolish of me." Another woman wrote, "I've always thought it was up to the individual to assert her rights, but the (proposed) constitution would take away some of those rights."

Eternal vigilance, it seems, is the price of equality. The individual can express her outrage through letters to the editor, letters and phone calls to elected representatives, a press release from her local church or community group or by calling open-line radio shows. Those are all good ways to air a personal opinion. But it's a giant step from individual actions to the collective co-ordinated campaign that can give public opinion irresistible strength.

Action can be fun. Even when you know that it's mainly symbolic, it's still more gratifying to act collectively than to fume privately. Action means getting together with other people to talk things over, finding out that other people have the same concerns that you have, and then taking those concerns to the people in power and publicly demanding that they do something about it.

A *Strong Start: How to know when you've found an issue.* When you discover that something you thought was personal also affects a lot of people you know, that could be an issue. When you and a lot of your friends keep saying, "Somebody ought to do something about this; there ought to be a law," that's an issue.

The next step is to *define it as an issue*. Personal anguish or outrage has to be set aside for a moment so you can look at how your concern affects the public interest. For instance, several serious situations involving toxic waste pollution have been discovered because women who work in their own homes have compared notes over the back fence or at the playground and discovered that all of their families were suffering nameless chronic health disorders of very similar kinds. Or they've learned that many pregnant women in the area have either miscarried or delivered infants with birth defects. As long as the individual woman defines the problem as "My family

HOW TO CHOOSE AN ISSUE

gets sick all the time," it remains a personal problem. But when several women get together and change the definition to "Suspicion that the local waste dump may be a serious public health hazard," then you have a public issue.

Research can bring the issue into focus. Research can tell you how many people are affected, and how others have handled the problem in the past. Research can reveal quite unexpected findings. "Research" means gathering facts, placing them in coherent order, and drawing conclusions from them. For instance, it's easy to assume that somehow everybody else in the world is unconcerned about whatever problem bothers you, from sexually transmitted diseases, to your kids crossing a busy street on the way to school, to having someone harassing you at work. Research will often show that you're not alone. For example, when Section 15 of the Charter of Rights came up for discussion, its promise of non-discrimination rights seemed like a motherhood question — who could oppose it? Then the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women lawyers reviewed women's cases heard under the existing Bill of Rights which dated from the Diefenbaker era, and found that the same wording "Equality before the law" had failed to protect women's equality in several important cases heard before the Supreme Court of Canada between 1960 and 1980. The lawyers' research brought the constitutional debate into focus as an urgent women's issue.

Finally, you need to *propose as well as protest*. You want to assemble a list of goals or specific demands within the core group before you go public. Having goals helps you to measure your progress. You can set one sweeping overall goal and then choose interim goals as steps along the way. Most of the issues you encounter will exist because it's easier for people in power to ignore the problem than to fix it. Much as you may resent bearing the brunt of their problem, your job is not to express that resentment, but to put the onus of responsibility back on the people in power.

Example: Employers often say that women are not promoted because they are often absent when their children are ill. A group of Ottawa women decided to *define the problem* as a political issue: lack of employers' support for family life interferes with women's advancement in the workforce. Note how their definition of the problem determined their directions and goals. (Other researchers have started by checking to see whether employers were correct in thinking women more likely than men to be absent, and have found that, statistically, women have fewer absences.)

This *research* helped bring the issue into focus: absentee costs are substantial enough that employers should be receptive to suggestions for relieving them.

The Ottawa group set a *long-term goal* of creating a new service industry: family care workers with nursing and housekeeping training, who could visit employees' homes (at the employers' expense) to take care of ailing children, spouses or relatives.

They set *short-term goals*: first, developing a training manual and finding a pilot project grant and a community college willing to sponsor the first Family Care Workers training program; then, selling the package to employers and/or unions as a desirable fringe benefit.

The Family Care Workers program, although in the testing stages, looks promising. It is used here just to sketch out the process — a process that can be and has been applied to a wide variety of issues. Definitions and goals are crucial to successful grass-roots organizing. Having good reasons for what you want makes you better able to persuade others to help you work for change.

Chapter One Checklist

1. Recognize when a personal problem might be a political issue.
2. Define the problem as an issue, in political terms.
3. Research the issue to bring it into focus.
4. Develop short-term and long-term goals for creating change.

CHAPTER TWO

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Besides the way the problem is stated, the difference between a personal concern and a political movement is the number of people involved. Once you've decided to take your interest past the letters-to-the-editor stage, you will want to *identify your allies*. There's no sense in duplicating a lot of research that someone else has already done. Government offices such as the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, the provincial status of women councils, the Women's Bureau of Labour Canada, and the Women's Program in the Secretary of State department are all good sources of information on women's issues. So are such volunteer women's organizations as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, the YWCA, and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. See the resource list on page 46 for addresses and other suggestions.

If you absolutely must talk to somebody right this very minute, grab your local phone directory and look under Community Information Services and/or Women's Information and Referral, which are available in most large cities. The pleasant volunteers who answer the phones at these centres have access to central listings of local social service agencies and active community groups; and usually they also have the time to help you figure out whether anyone else is already working on what you want to do, or on projects similar enough to be helpful to you. As well, the volunteer may suggest contacting an official agency like the provincial or federal Human Rights Commission or the Ministry of the Environment.

It's also worth your while to *comb the media* looking for references to your area of interest. Start keeping a memo pad and a pencil next to your radio and TV, so you can jot down the names of 1) people who are interviewed and 2) reporters who cover the subject. In the print media, of course, you can actually clip and keep items pertinent to

your project. Again, take note of the reporter's name. When and if your project gets off the ground, you will already have a list of reporters that you know cover your particular subjects.

Finally, head down to your local library and ask the library technician to recommend reference material. Also, while you're there, locate the Canadian Periodical Index and the Canadian Newspaper Index, which will enable you to scan months of publications in just a few minutes, by looking under the relevant index headings.

In all of this, of course, you are both educating yourself and looking for the names of people or organizations who may have already done some of the work ahead of you. Suppose you are concerned about the way word processing units are being installed in your workplace. From carefully reading stories in the media, you can get the names, titles and positions of people you need to know, including:

- people who have researched the health hazards, such as union officials and the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety;
- government officials who can explain policies and regulations;
- corporate executives who have worked on management study teams on office automation.

All these people can be useful to you. Some of them may be so actively and productively involved that you decide to join their campaign rather than starting your own. If you have trouble finding information on your chosen subject, don't be discouraged. That may just mean that you've become aware of an issue ahead of everyone else.

On the other hand, it may mean you're on the wrong track. Test yourself: if even the people most affected by the issue start to look glassy-eyed when you present your viewpoint, if even your closest friends try to change the subject or warn you away, then perhaps it's

time to find another approach. Beware the one-person crusade: it's draining and often futile.

An important issue will usually attract people to it almost by itself. Spreading accurate information may be enough to *build the core group*, which needn't be large if the members are dedicated. Five to fifteen committed people can accomplish an amazing amount of work. Fewer than a dozen women were at the centre of the November 1981 lobby to keep the equality rights clause paramount, and look what they accomplished.

Your friends may want to join the core group, or suggest people for it. Then there are the time-honoured methods of political organizing: door-to-door canvassing, a telephone tree campaign (see page 35), notices on community centre bulletin boards, getting on the agenda at community group meetings, or writing a short article for the community or workplace newspaper. If you have even two or three people already working with you, consider borrowing a meeting room from your local church, school or library, plastering the neighborhood with flyers, and kicking off your campaign with a public meeting.

"Wait, wait," some of you will be saying. "I have trouble steeling myself to talk to my boss or my child's teacher. How can I go knock on doors and convince strangers to join a campaign?" Yes Virginia, there is a secret to *meeting people*. Do what the politicians do: *write yourself a script*. Get clear in your own mind what you want to say, and rehearse it until you're comfortable. Make your contact brief, courteous, and to the point. Identify yourself, state the nature of your concern, explain why you think the person you've contacted can help you, and ask for something specific. Sample:

"Hello, my name is Frances Smith and I live a couple of blocks from here. I'm visiting my neighbours today to find out if they've noticed that their children have skin, kidney or respiratory problems while they've lived here, or if they've had problems keeping a pregnancy. I've had these problems myself, and it was only when I talked with

neighbours that I realized they seem to be particularly common around here. A group of us are getting together to ask the province to investigate the chemical plant up here. Would you like to join us?"

This script, in various forms, is going to carry you through the campaign. After two days of talking to strangers, you'll find the script rolls off your tongue automatically. You can use your new spiel in personal visits, phone calls, letters and briefs. The key is to adjust your script to your audience every time. For instance, the neighbourly approach above changes slightly when Frances uses the same script in a call to the Minister of the Environment's office:

"Hello, my name is Frances Smith, and I'm calling for a group of neighborhood women who have noticed similar and very serious health problems in our families. I heard you on CBC the other day, and I'd like to know what help your department can offer us in investigating the chemical plant in our area."

Sooner or later, you will want to write your script down so you can hand it out as a flyer, or deliver it as a brief. *Writing a flyer* is like entering one of those contests that asks you to say something in twenty-five words or less. You want to get a lot of information across in as few words as possible. A snappy slogan helps. For instance, for the script above, Frances can write this quick flyer:

Guard Our Children's Health

We are a group of long-term neighborhood residents. We have noticed that our children have suffered a lot of skin diseases in the last two years. We are urgently requesting the provincial Ministry of the Environment to investigate whether the local chemical plant is emitting anything that could cause skin problems. If you have noticed increased family health problems, and/or if you are interested in working with us, contact Frances Smith, 555-1212."

(Note: to have any credibility, flyers must be signed by a person or group and should give an address, box number or phone number. For personal security, avoid giving any woman's full name and home address on a public flyer.)

This style of presentation is adaptable to all different kinds of causes. Let's run through the steps one more time, with a different case history.

Example: Deborah found that her bright young daughter Deirdre was bored and unhappy at school and was regarded by her teacher as a daydreamer and a behaviour problem.

Deborah *defined the problem* as the classroom's failure to keep Deirdre interested and involved.

She *researched* the question: getting Deirdre's eyes and hearing checked; reviewing the school material with her; sitting down for a long talk with her teacher, who ended up saying, "I just don't have time to give to a bright kid when the slower kids need me more."

Deborah raised her concern at a Parent-Teacher Association meeting, the first she'd ever attended, and *found some allies*: three other parents who had had similar experiences. She called the Community Information Service and was referred to an organization for parents of gifted children. There a volunteer offered to address a start-up meeting to *build a core group* at the school, and told her that funds were available from the Board of Education for any school wishing to hire non-teachers for enrichment programs.

A notice in the PTA newsletter and another notice posted in the local supermarket brought out about twenty parents for a meeting. The group quickly *defined their goals* as 1) getting enrichment workers hired, and 2) getting a separate classroom for gifted kids. Deborah lobbied the school principal on behalf of the group, was instantly offered the job, and accepted. But that was just the beginning. The woman on whom this case history is based got so used to organizing

that one year later she ran as city councillor—and won—and four years after that, she won the mayoralty.

Chapter Two Checklist

1. Identify your allies so you can avoid duplicating work.
2. Comb the media to find out what's been reported on the topic.
3. Build a core group of active, committed people.
4. Write yourself a script for meeting people, and use it to enlist other people to help you. Rewrite the script as a flyer.

CHAPTER THREE

RIGHT ON TARGET

A lobbying campaign is like a water hose with a nozzle that can be adjusted from a gentle splash to a strong, stinging spray. Lobbyists should be equally adaptable. One style is good for nurturing friendships, another for pushing opposition out of the way. Both styles are useful, depending on the situation. And situations do shift. At least, successful campaigns change all the time, because usually their objective is to change people's minds.

Who's in Charge Here Anyway?

Pinning responsibility where it belongs can be more complicated than you'd expect. Hospitals, for instance, are regulated by their own hospital boards, the city or township, the provincial or territorial health ministry and Health & Welfare Canada. A group seeking funds for a new hospital program may be referred from the local level to the federal and back to the provincial or territorial, which can use up a lot of time.

So a fundamental step in developing strategy will be to figure out where jurisdiction lies for the issue in question. Sometimes you will have to present your demands to two or more levels of government at the same time, co-ordinating between federal and provincial or territorial, or provincial, territorial and municipal governments. When the provinces and territories demanded the authority to override equality rights (in November 1981), women had to lobby in all provinces and territories simultaneously while persuading the federal government to delay a final decision until they were all on board.

Once again, the telephone is your best tool for sorting things out. Your local community information centre will probably suggest official contacts as well as volunteer groups. The Blue Pages of the telephone directory will give you general information numbers for

most government departments, and the switchboard operator will try to find somebody in the department who can answer your questions.

And once again, a specific question is most likely to get a specific answer. So, especially when you're doing basic research, you may feel you're on a wild goose chase. Don't despair. As a last resort, call the office of a) the federal Cabinet Minister; b) the provincial Premier or Cabinet Minister; or c) the Mayor. Once you get through, explain your problem and say that you believe you've been getting a runaround in your search for information. Probably you will get a call back from the top person's own advisor, who will direct you to someone who can help. A referral from the top level can be a big boost in getting co-operation at the lower level.

Okay Then, Who's on First?

Even before the jurisdiction question is sorted out, the clever activist will start preparing a list of individuals who have information and/or power in the area. In fact, two lists would be helpful: one of the people who can help you (allies), and one of the people whose minds you want to change (targets).

Every smart politician knows that the key to winning elections or putting a new law on the books is to keep a careful count of who's supporting either side, and who's undecided. That's why canvassers go out at election time: as well as recruiting new supporters, they count the voters they expect to get at each poll, and they can usually tell in advance which polls they will carry. A smart lobbyist turns the tables on them, by canvassing the politicians and counting who supports the lobby and who opposes it.

Can't Tell the Players Without a Scorecard

The names will change, but the scorecard you draw up for each issue will probably include people in the following positions:

the Minister responsible (or the Mayor);
the Minister's (or Mayor's) aides and top bureaucratic advisors;
the Opposition critic and aides and advisors;
contacts at any government agency or council involved in the issue;
contacts at non-government groups working in the area;
MPs, members of provincial or territorial legislatures or City Councillors who have been most vocal on the issue, and their aides;
business people whose commercial interests are involved;
media people who are reporting or commenting on the issue.

These are the people on whom the campaign hose will be turned: a gentle flow of information and reinforcement for those who agree with you; a similar gentle flow, with extra cultivation for those who are undecided; and a strong spray aimed at the opposition in hopes of washing them away. Identifying key players by name means you can direct your efforts where they will do the most good.

Example: A hypothetical case where a Canadian city announces a plan to license prostitutes. Any women found in or near the redlight district will be required to show her licence or else prove that's not her line of work. Although different women's groups have taken various stands on prostitution, let's say that in this hypothetical case, all could agree that the proposal was discriminatory.

A women's group immediately calls a public meeting, which draws a huge crowd, where the *problem and goal* are defined as an urgent need to halt what this group calls an absurd, sexist plan.

Research shows the jurisdiction is complicated. The city will need enabling legislation from the provincial or territorial government and a change in the Criminal Code at the federal level.

Allies are found in the federal and provincial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women; in the National Association of Women and the

Law (NAWL), the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), the YWCA, and practically all the feminist groups across Canada. NAC and NAWL (through their member groups) agree to take over lobbying at the federal, provincial and territorial levels, in close co-ordination with the Status of Women's activities at City Council.

Targets are identified: federally, the Ministers of Justice, Social Development, and the Status of Women; provincially or territorially, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Attorney-General. City Councillors find their phones ringing off the hook with irate constituents demanding to know if they support or oppose the licensing proposal. Soon that city's Status of Women has assembled a list of the Mayor and Councillors who think licensing is a great idea, and they are inundated with mail, phone calls and visits. Selected reporters begin receiving news releases every day. Within a week, the Mayor announces that the plan has been referred to a committee for further study.



*hen Women Work Together
True or False?*

1. *Politics is mainly a male world.*
2. *Women do things differently than men.*
3. *Women have to learn how men do things in order to have any effect in politics.*
4. *Women have to do things the same way that men do in order to have any effect in politics.*

The first three statements are true; the fourth is false. Women do not have to become counterfeit men in order to be politically potent. Women have a potency of their own. But women still are hampered by some of the male political stereotypes of women. Some men still believe that women can't keep secrets, or work together without catfights, or stand up and speak out in public, or find the time for

public affairs. Women must be aware that these stereotypes still exist, and that some people will play to these perceived weaknesses.

A Different Style

Men's organizations have evolved along the lines of the military and the corporation: hierarchical, with one boss at the top of a clear chain of command. Women's organizations have evolved, to a great extent, from family roles and from egalitarian groups like volunteer societies, church and professional clubs. The result is that women tend to be "team players" who make sure the work gets done and don't care who gets the credit. Women are also more likely than men to be concerned about hurting someone else's feelings. This concern for the process as well as the goal can be a handicap for women when working in a group with men — or it can be women's greatest organizing strength when working with other women.

As the constitutional lobby proved, the organizational style to which women have become accustomed lends itself to mobilizing effective grass-roots protests. From the end of January to November of 1981, women all over Canada were spontaneously moved to participate — and their undirected volunteer actions strengthened the whole effort. The campaign was open enough so that novices could easily join in, and structured enough so that veteran campaigners could contribute as much or as little as they had time for. That kind of flexibility requires terrific communications systems, a lot of tact, and a sense of shared leadership. Shared leadership is particularly suited for women's political action, where committee work is very likely to be a third job for each individual, on top of employment and caring for her family.

Chapter Three Checklist

1. Figure out where jurisdiction lies.
2. Start a list of powerful or knowledgeable individuals.
3. Canvass the people you want to influence, and record their opinions.
4. Draw up a scorecard showing your supporters and your opponents, and what positions they play (note: this might be a mental scorecard, but it's information you should have).

CHAPTER FOUR

STRATEGY

NOW THAT YOU KNOW WHERE YOU WANT TO GO, HOW DO YOU GET THERE FROM HERE?

So far, we've been talking as though a campaign can be planned at leisure. Some issues do seem to go on forever without satisfactory resolution, such as daycare, equal pay for work of equal value, pensions, and full rights for all native women. Some other issues, however, seem to appear very quickly and need immediate response. That's when a political novice is likely to be plunged right into action without knowing what to expect.

Example: In 1979, the Alberta Human Rights Code was amended to allow the provincial Cabinet to approve applications from businesses wishing to be exempted from the Code's equal pay requirement. To date, no such exemptions have been made public. However, let's take a hypothetical case where a top-level bureaucrat suddenly resigns her position and calls a press conference to announce that the Cabinet has already granted one such application and is considering two others. The Alberta Status of Women Action Committee (ASWAC) believes the exemption is a horrendous precedent, and calls on Alberta women to lobby against it. The government admits the applications have been made, but says that women should be grateful to have any kind of job in a tight economy. How do you respond?

On Your Own:

Pick up your telephone, call an Alberta MPP, and state your opposition to the exemptions. Write a letter re-stating your opinion, send it to the MPP and a copy to your local paper. Attend ASWAC's public forum on the issue, sign the petition, and make a donation.

Forming A Group:

At the ASWAC forum, you pick up an information sheet asking women all over the province to form groups and keep the pressure on until the government apologizes and promises to introduce a bill closing the Human Rights Code loophole. You start talking up the

issue and soon find eight other women who are willing to form a group.

Start the first meeting by choosing a chairperson and a minutes-taker, and drawing up an agenda. Usually what happens is that the person who suggests a task also ends up doing it, so it's to everyone's advantage to ensure that each member of the group has a chance to speak. Usually you'd have to map out the questions you need to have answered before you can start making decisions. This time, the ASWAC flyer should have most of the information already. In fact, you may be able to use the flyer as the basis for your script.

Now brainstorm for names of people who belong on your lists, which are the most valuable organizing tools in your group. At this stage, you're just suggesting names; later you'll fill in the blanks so eventually you will have:

- a target list, with each target's full name, office address and phone, home phone (if possible), and full name(s) of secretary, or assistants assigned to the issue;
- a media list, organized by publication or broadcast station, with names of specific reporters and/or editors, address, phone number and extension, and deadlines;
- a supporters list, with the names of everyone who told anyone in the group that "I'd like to help, but I can't come to meetings." Get names, addresses, and phone numbers. Maybe they will write letters or make phone calls;
- a support group list, with contact numbers for the office or at least two members of the core group or executive. (These will be groups like ASWAC, your local church group, the Alberta government Women's Bureau, the YWCA, etc.) Also note the frequency of their general meetings, newsletters, and any special resources they can offer your core group, such as office space or skilled volunteers.

Sometimes your list of targets will also include people who might be supporters. Consider this possibility whenever your targets include a high-profile woman who has made pro-woman statements in the past. Make her one of your first contacts. If she's already working on the issue, it helps her to be able to publicly say, "I've had 25 phone calls on this already." If she believes she cannot work on this particular issue openly, for whatever reason, she may be willing to coach you, if you promise to be discreet about it.

Brainstorming can be fun. In fact, it can be hilarious. Dream up the most devastating responses you could make, write them all down, and sort through them afterwards. Your long-term goal is to close the loophole in the Human Rights Code. What short-term goals build towards that? You can stir up public opinion through forums and workshops, news conferences, picket lines and demonstrations. You want to direct pressure to your own MPP and to all members of the provincial Cabinet. You want to show them that your blessing can make them popular and your anger can make their lives miserable.

You could consider asking that all women who work in the Alberta government wear black armbands to work and observe a five-minute "mourning" strike for their lost rights. You could bake a gigantic loaf of bread, cut off one-third of it, and present it to the Premier on the steps of the legislature, as a symbol of how women are paid two-thirds as much as men. Presenting two-thirds of a turkey ("Turkey to the turkeys") is an idea that seems to come up now and then.

Checklist: from personal to political action

1. Act on your own.
2. Form a group, have a meeting.
3. Draw up lists: targets, media, supporters and ally groups.
4. Brainstorm to develop a course of action.

Strategy: Going Through Channels

Whatever issue motivated you to reach for this booklet — whether it be getting a stop sign at your corner or working towards world disarmament — usually the way to achieve your aim is to influence the people in power. If only you'd known in advance how important the issue would be to you, you might have monitored the legislative process for the last several months, or you could have worked within the party of your choice to become a candidate — and you might already be in a position where the people in power would co-operate because they know you and owe you favours. But we will assume for now that you are starting from outside the corridors of power and want to get your message inside fast. Sometimes this can be done through official channels: by presenting a brief to a legislative committee; or by insistently raising the issue during an election campaign.

Election Time Tactics:

On general principles, it is a shame to let an election go by without raising women's issues during the campaign. There's almost always something that needs to be corrected, in any jurisdiction. And this is the time that people who have power or who want power are most accessible. There are several ways you can get your views recognized:

- you can target one candidate (usually the incumbent) whose track record on the issue(s) has been less than adequate; or
- you can raise consciousness on the issue(s) with all the candidates;
- you could seek private meetings with candidates; or
- you could arrange an all-candidates' meeting on your issue(s); or
- you could circulate a list of questions, recruit people, and make sure that the questions are raised at every meeting in your ward or riding.

Research will help you formulate the kind of specific questions that require answers useful to you. For instance, if you ask, "What is your position on daycare?", the response can be, "I'm for it." But being *for* something doesn't mean that the candidate will make an effort to achieve it. A more useful question would be something like, "Two months ago, the provincial task force on daycare recommended creating a board to license and supervise private-home daycare. Do you agree with the task force's recommendations and, if so, what will you do during the next session to ensure that they're implemented?"

Presenting A Brief:

All levels of government sometimes create task forces to study issues and to hear submissions from experts and from citizen's groups before legislation is drafted. These are valuable opportunities to get in at the very beginning of the process. As an alternative, you may be able to wangle an invitation to address a legislative committee considering a draft bill that has already been presented to the House. This is more likely to be a formality. Once a bill has been introduced, major changes are unlikely. Still, making a good impression at the committee can be a solid foundation for any action you may take afterwards.

Most of the research for your brief should already be in your script: your definition of the issue, your facts and statistics, your suggested solutions. The core group will have to decide which two or three points (at most) you want to stress; any more than that, and you risk losing your audience. Keep your brief as short as possible, have it beautifully typed, and bring some extra copies. Choose your spokesperson for her ease in addressing groups and remember that she and the others in your delegation should look business-like. Circulate a news release before the meeting, announcing the key points you'll be presenting, and then hold a news conference after, to talk about how you were received.

The Friendly Target

Between elections and task forces, you'll have to find other ways to get your message to your targets. Start with the friendly approach: send a letter or a brief and then follow up a week later with a phone call asking for a response and/or an appointment. Be polite, but be persistent. Remind your target (or assistant) of the ways your target will benefit by showing sensitivity to your concerns. Be nice until you have to be not-so-nice. Often being nice will suffice. If you can't get immediate agreement, get an appointment.

Face To Face: Your Place Or Mine?

Usually, a person in power will expect your group to come to his or her office for an appointment. This has several advantages: all the relevant files and papers should be handy; other people in the office can be consulted; a small meeting can be very direct and to the point.

Occasionally, perhaps at election time, you may prefer to have the target come to you, for the following advantages: you may feel more comfortable on home territory; you can invite your supporters and ally groups to the event; a large meeting gives everyone in the group a chance to speak; a promise made before a large group is harder to disavow than a promise made to only two or three people.

Whatever the venue, you will want to make the most of this opportunity. Re-write your script, pitching it to your target's interests and jurisdiction. Long-standing women's lobby groups have found the team approach helpful: the person who is most comfortable speaking in public does the introductions and most of the talking, while the person who is most familiar with the subject matter is there for back-up. Bringing a person who carries a tape recorder and takes notes is also a good idea, and you might bring a fourth person to observe body language, aides' reactions, and other valuable clues. Teamwork gives moral support and lets each of you concentrate on her own job.

Your target's job, meanwhile, is to make you happy without adding to his or her workload, or making promises that are difficult to keep. Therefore your target may treat you to reminiscences of childhood, philosophizing about the role of government, or complaints about how other women's groups have behaved. When your target starts rambling, you should politely pull the conversation back to the subject you came to discuss. Ask, "Why are you telling us this?" Or say, "That's very interesting, but right now we're here to talk about this other subject."

T*he Unfriendly Target*

Targets sometimes do not return their phone calls, or call back only to convey bad news. Sometimes people in power need to be convinced that your presentation expresses widely felt public opinion, and not just that of a few non-conformists. And sometimes a target's own beliefs prevail, no matter what public opinion is. When a target refuses to be won over, then it's time to show that you can make a fuss that cannot be ignored.

Pull out your lists of supporters and support groups, count them up, and decide what you want to ask them to do. One way to multiply the effect of a small list is to start a "telephone tree". Call each person on your list, ask her to take part in the lobby, and then ask her to call five more people and persuade them to do the same. Theoretically, starting with five people, on the fifth go-round such a tree would reach more than 15,000 people. Of course, all those people are going to co-operate with you only if they agree that the issue is important, so you'd better have a good motive and write yourselves a good sales pitch. Make it easy for others to help you: give them the information they need (phone number, address) and ask for something specific. Here are some time-honoured methods of lobbying politicians and corporations by having your supporters make personal contact.

Telephone Lobbies can be activated quickly as a sledgehammer response to, say, a politician's offensive remark. It can disrupt a person's whole day when dozens of indignant people tie up the office telephone lines demanding an explanation — but it can also give the person a chance to explain or to reconsider.

Telegram Lobbies can be put into action almost as fast as phone lobbies and offer a speedy, cheap and convenient way to send a message to another town. Telegrams still have a certain political mystique that enhances their effectiveness, and they're suited to sending to several people at the same time, so that a few dozen people could blanket the House of Commons quickly if they wanted to. CN/CP Telecommunications offers a special low rate for telegram messages of fifteen words or less if addressed to a Member of Parliament.

Letter Lobbies take some time to organize but are well worth it for on-going issues because usually your target will feel obliged to respond to each personal letter and therefore has time for sober second thought. Your core group should draft a sample letter, copy and distribute it to lobby participants—but urge them to write their own personal letters rather than mail in the form letter. Remind the people helping you that no postage is required for letters addressed to a Member of Parliament, as long as the sender writes OHMS (On Her Majesty's Service) on the upper right corner of the envelope. Letter lobbies also give you a chance to explain why you think the issue is so important. A good, short (one page) persuasive letter can sometimes get you an interview even when your phone calls aren't returned.

How do you know whether your lobby is effective? Sad to say, you might find out the bad news by reading it in the paper. But good news, when it comes, often arrives as an invitation to come in and talk about your issue.

Strategy: going through channels

1. Raising the issue during elections.
2. Presenting a brief.
3. Courting the friendly target.
4. Arranging and conducting a meeting.
5. Getting the respect of an unfriendly target: telephone, telegram and letter lobbies.

The Public Campaign: Media Relations

Do you always believe what you read in the paper or see on TV? Or have you noticed, on things you know about, that some-

times reports agree with what you know, and sometimes they don't? Usually, the difference is the reporter covering the story. If you don't already pay attention to by-lines, now is the time to start. Most newspaper articles and almost all magazine articles carry the writer's name at the beginning, right under the headline or title. Broadcast reporters "sign off" with their names. If you have been collecting clippings, sort through them now and notice if any particular reporters' names come up consistently. Those names are the beginning of your media contact list. As you notice TV and radio reporters, jot their names down too. When you contact ally groups, ask them if there are any reporters or editors they particularly cultivate. Before long, you'll have a working list of people who are likely to take the time to read your news releases. Whether the item gets ink or airtime depends on deadlines and the other news breaking that day.

News releases can be used to notify the media of an upcoming event, to recap the highlights of a speech or a meeting, or any other time that you want to get a statement into newsrooms quickly. News releases are usually issued by groups, rather than individuals, and the group is always identified in the last paragraph. It is not unusual to follow up a news release a day or two later, with a phone call offering to clarify any points on which the reporter has questions. This is the normal way to build media contacts.

The News Interview

Reporters ask a lot of questions that may sound dumb to you. Sometimes that means the reporter is checking your answers against other information; sometimes the reporter needs to have basic information explained in your own words in order to write an interesting story; and sometimes the reporter knows absolutely nothing about the story and needs to be thoroughly briefed.

Always assume that everything you say during an interview will be quoted publicly. That's what an interview is for. "Off the record" comments should be the rare exception; always say *before* a comment you don't want attributed to you, "Don't quote me on this, but. . ."

You can, of course, politely decline to answer questions, refer the reporter to someone else, or offer to get back to the reporter when you've had time to double-check your reply. Do not guess at information or try to mislead the reporter; if the dumb question is a way of checking your replies against other information, you just lose credibility.

Be wary of a question like, "Another women's group has made such-and-such a comment on this issue. How do you respond to that?" Unless you know from other sources what the other group said, and your group has decided on an answer, you're probably wise to duck the question. Say, "I wasn't aware they had made that comment, and I'd like to talk to them about it before I respond publicly." Also, be careful about agreeing with a question like, "That other group is really weird on this one, eh?" If you say yes, you may find the words attributed to you. Smile and say, "You said it, I didn't."

Ideally, one member of your core group should begin to specialize in media relations, and should be free of other responsibilities during public events so that she's always available to help reporters. Often, your opening shot in a campaign will be a news release which, if it's picked up at all, will both recruit new supporters and put pressure on whomever you're lobbying.

Here is the formula for writing a news release:

Most pension plans fail to protect women, CACSW President Sylvia Gold told the Community Contacts for the Widowed annual meeting today. (Opening paragraph gives four W's: Who did What, Where and When; try for five.)

"Only 29 per cent of employed women, as opposed to 40 per cent of employed men, are covered by private plans," Ms. Gold said, "and even then women usually pay higher premiums in expectation of lower benefits than men. (Quotations are important in a release; use two or three.) She explained that insurance companies expect women to live longer and collect benefits longer, and so adjust the pay-out downward. (Here's the fifth W: Why.)

Community Contacts for the Widowed, celebrating its seventh anniversary last weekend, is a non-profit self-help group for people whose spouses have died. (Bottom paragraph always identifies and describes the group.) For further information contact Mary Smith, 334-5789. (Always give a contact number, and make sure someone's there to answer the phone.)

The News Conference

Reporters prefer exclusive interviews, but they will attend a news conference when it's the only way to get important information. Usually the people giving the news conference read a prepared statement, distribute copies, and then field questions. Coffee and snacks encourage reporters to stay. For best results, try to schedule news conferences—and distribute news releases—early in the week, and before noon. That way you're likely to slide in under everybody's deadlines.

The Weekend Conference

Getting coverage for a weekend conference requires careful planning and advance publicity. Look more to the broadcast media than to print. Broadcasters have to work weekends anyway, while print reporters get overtime pay for weekend assignments—unless they offer to do it on their own time.

Although the news release announcing the conference will probably stress the size of the event and the number of participants, reporters who attend will probably be looking for detail and colour. You can help them by providing:

- thumbnail biographies of the speakers
- copies of the speeches
- detailed programs describing the workshops

- an informed person constantly available to help arrange interviews, locate organizers, give directions
- a quiet media room for private interviews
- typewriters and telephones
- coffee and cookies

By the Way . . .

An awful lot of media people are smokers. It's almost an occupational hazard.

Chapter Four Checklist

1. Compile a media list.
2. Learn how to handle a news interview.
3. Learn how to write a news release.
4. Have a news conference.
5. How to get coverage for a weekend conference.

CHAPTER FIVE

ETERNAL VIGILANCE

Only twenty years ago, feminist activists had to consider whether being called unladylike would affect their credibility. They had to think and act defensively. In the 1980s, and until women hold half the top decision-making posts, women have a lot to gain by following the ancient political rule of thumb: play from strength. In Canada, women's strength grew so powerful from the 1981 constitutional lobby that some issues can now be settled very quickly just by identifying them as women's issues and showing how equality is jeopardized. Every women's campaign, from now on, can be used to build on that success and continue to increase women's collective political clout. And it's crucial that women seize this advantage, because the interpretation of the Constitution has only just begun.

There are two clauses in the new Charter of Rights that have special meaning for every woman: Sections 15 and 28.

Section 15: (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

(2) Subsection (1) does not preclude any law, program, or activity that has as its object the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups including those that are disadvantaged because of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Section 28: Notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.

Section 28 is the equality rights clause. It was added to the Charter because resolutions from the Women and the Constitution conference, held February 14, 1981, demanded that an overriding statement of equality be included in the constitutional package. A core group of Ottawa and Toronto women lobbied Parliament hard for

two months, and won all-party agreement for the new clause. It became effective in April 1982, when the new Constitution was proclaimed. It is not subject to the override clause in Section 33.

Section 15 is the non-discrimination rights clause, stating that laws may not discriminate on certain specified grounds, including sex. As a result of a public campaign headed by the CACSW in the fall of 1980, the wording in Section 15 was changed from "equal before the law" to "equal before and under the law." Section 15 came into effect in 1985 — three years after the Constitution was proclaimed — and it is subject to the override clause in Section 33.

Section 33: (1) Parliament or the legislature of a province may expressly declare in an Act of Parliament or of the legislature, as the case may be, that the Act or a provision thereof shall operate notwithstanding a provision included in section 2 or sections 7 to 15 of this Charter.

This section gives authority to the provincial and federal legislatures to enact laws that are contrary to certain sections of the Charter, simply by including a phrase in the new law that begins, "Notwithstanding the Charter of Rights. . ."

There are four more subsections in Section 33, which specify that a law passed under the override clause shall have force for a maximum of five years, with a five-year re-enactment allowed. It is up to the courts to decide how Sections 15 and 28 will apply — that is, assuming no one uses the Section 33 override.

It has been said that any government invoking Section 33 would be committing political suicide. Stranger things have happened in politics. Two of the hypothetical examples used earlier in the book, the prostitute licence and the Human Rights Code exemptions, might be seen by the respective governments as enough reason to invoke Section 33. Any such proposal must be met with fierce opposition the minute it's made public—or better yet, women should immediately begin constructing communications networks into government in order to know about any plans to use Section 33 before they're made public.

The methods outlined in this guide-book can be applied to a wide variety of situations, because women tend to be pulled into political action for a variety of reasons. We hope that once you have become politicized, you will want to remain active. Women discovered a new solidarity and a profound political strength during the 1981 constitutional lobby. That strength must be exercised regularly, or it will atrophy.

Just before the House of Commons voted on whether to include Section 28 in the Charter, every Member of Parliament received a personal invitation that read, in part:

"WE INVITE YOU to strengthen further the Charter with respect to women's equality. . . You can be assured that we will be continuing our work for constitutional improvements on behalf of the women of this country. AND WE INVITE YOU to support us in these efforts."

The invitation remains open.

RESOURCES

The following organizations have collected a great deal of information about women's issues; they may also be able to help you locate other women's groups who share your interests in your community. Most of them offer valuable publications (many free of charge) and will supply you with a list on request.

GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Box 1541, Station B
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5R5 (613) 992-4975

Women's Program
Secretary of State
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0M5 (819) 994-3190

Women's Bureau
Labour Canada
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0J2 (819) 997-1550

Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6 (613) 995-8281

Canadian Human Rights Commission
90 Sparks Street
4th Floor
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 1E1 (613) 995-1151

Check the Blue Pages of your local directory to locate your provincial Human Rights Commission, Women's Bureau, or Advisory Council on the Status of Women (or call the office of your MP, member of provincial or territorial legislature and ask someone there to look them up in the government directory).

RESOURCES – NON-GOVERNMENTAL GROUPS

National Action Committee on the Status of Women
344 Bloor Street West, Suite 505
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1W9 (416) 922-3246

National Association of Women and the Law
323 Chapel Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7Z2 (613) 238-1544

Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women
151 Slater Street, Suite 408
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5H3 (613) 563-0681

Canadian Federation of University Women
55 Parkdale Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario
K1Y 1E5 (613) 722-8732

Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs
56 Sparks Street, Room 308
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5A9 (613) 234-7619

YWCA of Canada
80 Gerrard Street East
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1G6 (416) 593-9886

Women's Liberal Commission
Liberal Party of Canada
102 Bank Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5N4 (613) 237-0740

Women's Bureau
Progressive Conservative Party of Canada
161 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5J2 (613) 238-6111

PLAY FROM STRENGTH

Participation of Women Committee, New Democratic Party
301 Metcalfe Street
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1R9 (613) 236-3613



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The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Box 1541, Station B
Ottawa, Canada K1P 5R5 (613) 992-4975

Eastern Office:

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women
800 Dorchester West, Suite 1036
Montreal, Quebec H3B 1X9 (514) 283-3123

Western Offices:

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women
220-4th Avenue S.E., 8th Floor
Calgary, Alberta T2G 4X3 (403) 292-6668

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women
269 Main Street, Suite 600
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 1B2 (204) 949-3140

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